



Critique of Cine-Structuralism (Part II)

Brian Henderson

Film Quarterly, Vol. 27, No. 2. (Winter, 1973-1974), pp. 37-46.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0015-1386%28197324%2F197424%2927%3A2%3C37%3ACOC%28I%3E2.0.CO%3B2-O>

Film Quarterly is currently published by University of California Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucal.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

2. *Arts*, No. 653 (January, 1958).
3. Review of *What is Cinema?* *Artforum*, vol. 6, no. 10 (Summer, 1968), p. 70.
4. Edward Buscombe, "The Idea of Authorship," *Screen*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1973).
5. *Arts*, No. 613 (April, 1957).
6. *Arts*, No. 529 (July, 1955).
7. *Cahiers du Cinéma in English*, no. 1, p. 36.

8. *Notes of a Film Director* (Dover, New York, 1970), p. 113.
9. *The Cinema of Francois Truffaut* (A. S. Barnes, New York, 1970), p. 8.
10. *Kenyon Review*, vol. 13 (Winter, 1951), p. 72.
11. *Truffaut*, *ibid.*
12. Lesage, *Cinéaste*, vol. 5, no. 3 (Summer, 1972), 42-48; MacBean, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 1 (Fall, 1972), 30-44; Henderson, *Socialist Revolution*, no. 12.

BRIAN HENDERSON

Critique of Cine-Structuralism (Part II)

This text is concerned with the *Cahiers du Cinéma* text "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*" and with Ben Brewster's notes on this text in the most recent issue of *Screen*.¹ The *Cahiers* study is most interesting for the method of reading films which it proposes and carries out. Brewster's article reads the *Cahiers* reading. It also seeks to provide the *Cahiers* method with an altered or improved theoretical underpinning. In so doing it seems to turn *Screen's* important work on Christian Metz in a distinctly new direction.

The *Cahiers* methodology is set forth clearly at the outset of the *Young Mr. Lincoln* text.

1. Object: a certain number of "classic" films, which today are *readable* (and therefore, anticipating our definition of method we will designate this work as one of reading) insofar as we can distinguish the historicity of their inscription: the relation of these films to the codes (social, cultural . . .) for which they are a site of intersection, and to other films, themselves held in an intertextual space; therefore, the relation of these films to the ideology which they convey, a particular "phase" which they represent, and to the events (present, past, historical, mythical, fictional) which they aimed to represent. . . .

2. Our work will therefore be a *reading* in the sense of a *rescanning* of these films. That is, to define it negatively first: (a) it will not be (yet another) commentary. The function of the commentary is to distill

an ideally constituted sense presented as the object's ultimate meaning (which however remains elusive indefinitely, given the infinite possibilities of talking about film): a wandering and prolific pseudo-reading which misses the reality of the inscription, and substitutes for it a discourse consisting of a simple ideological delineation of what appear(s) to be the main statement(s) of the film at a given moment.

(b) Nor will it be a new *interpretation*, i.e. the translation of what is supposed to be already in the film into a critical system (metalanguage) where the interpreter has the kind of absolute knowledge of the exegetist blind to the (historical) ideological determination of his practice and his object-pretext, when he is not a hermeneute à la Viridiana slotting things into a pre-ordained structure.

(c) Nor will this be a dissection of an object conceived of as a closed structure, the cataloguing of progressively smaller and more "discrete" units; in other words, an inventory of the elements which ignores their predestination for the film-maker's writing project and, having added a portion of intelligibility to the initial object, claims to deconstruct, then reconstruct that object, without taking any account of the dynamic of the inscription. Not, therefore, a mechanistic structural reading.

(d) Nor finally will it be a demystification in the sense where it is enough to re-locate the film within its historical determinations, "reveal" its assumptions, declare its problematic and its aesthetic prejudices and criticize its statement in the name of a mechanically applied materialist knowledge, in order to see it collapse

and feel no more needs to be said. . . . (An effective reading can only be such by returning on its own deciphering operation and by integrating its functioning into the text it produces, which is something quite different from brandishing a method—even if it is marxist-leninist—and leaving it at that.) . . . (A) materialist reading of art products which appear to lack any intentional critical dimension concerning capitalist relations of production must do the same thing [consider literary work not as a reflection of the relations of production, but as having a place *within* these relations].²

What will be attempted here through a re-scansion of these films in a process of active reading is to make them say what they have to say *within* what they leave unsaid, to reveal their constituent lacks; these are neither faults in the work (since these films, as Jean-Pierre Oudart has clearly demonstrated—see the preceding issue—are the work of extremely skilled film-makers) nor a deception on the part of the author (for why should he practice deception?); they are *structuring absences*, always displaced—an overdetermination which is the only possible basis from which these discourses could be realised, the unsaid included in the said and necessary to its constitution. In short, to use Althusser's expression—"the internal shadows of exclusion."

The films we will be studying do not need filling out, they do not demand a teleological reading, nor do we require them to account for their *external* shadows (except purely and simply to dismiss them); all that is involved is traversing their statement to locate what sets it in place, to double their writing with an active reading to reveal what is already there, but silent (cf. the notion of *palimpsest* in Barthes and Daney), to make them say not only "what this says, but what it doesn't say because it doesn't want to say it" (J. A. Miller, and we would add: what, while intending to leave unsaid, it is nevertheless obliged to say). . . .

[T]he structuring absences mentioned above and the establishment of an ersatz which this dictates have some connection with the sexual *other scene*, and that "other other scene" which is politics; that the double repression—politics and eroticism—which our reading will bring out (a repression which cannot be indicated once and for all and left at that but rather has to be written into the constantly renewed process of its repression) allows the answer to be deduced; and this is an answer whose very question would not have been possible without the two discourses of overdetermination, the Marxist and the Freudian. This is why we will not choose films for their value as "eternal masterpieces" but rather because the negatory force of their writing provides enough *scope* for a reading—because they can be re-written.³

Since the essay "returns on its own deciphering operation" again and again, its methodology discussions are not limited to the introductory section. After sections on Hollywood in 1938–39, the USA in 1938–39, Fox and Zanuck, and Ford and Lincoln, a section called Ideological Undertaking asks, "What is the subject of *Young Mr. Lincoln*?" The previous sections have established economic and political conditions in the US just prior to the film's making. They conclude that the Republican Zanuck wanted to make a film about the Republican Lincoln in order to promote a Republican victory in the Presidential election of 1940. This explains politically and economically why and how the film was put into production; these factors determine but are not the same thing as the ideological undertaking of the film. The latter is:

the *reformulation* of the historical figure of Lincoln on the level of the myth and the eternal.

This ideological project may appear to be clear and simple—of the edifying and apologetic type. Of course, if one considers its statements alone, extracting it as a *separable ideological statement* disconnected from the complex network of determinations through which it is realised and inscribed—through which it possibly even criticizes itself—then it is easy to operate an illusory deconstruction of the film through a reading of the demystificatory type (see 1). Our work, on the contrary, will consist in activating this network in its complexity, where philosophical assumptions (idealism, theologism), political determinations (republicanism, capitalism) and the relatively autonomous aesthetic process (characters, cinematic *signifiers*, narrative mode) specific to Ford's writing, intervene simultaneously. If our work, which will necessarily be held to the linear sequentiality of the discourse, should isolate the orders of determination interlocking in the film, it will always be in the perspective of their relations: it therefore demands a recurrent reading, on all levels.

7. Methodology

Young Mr. Lincoln, like the vast majority of Hollywood films, follows linear and chronological narrative, in which events appear to follow each other according to a certain "natural" sequence and logic. Thus two options were open to us: either, in discussing each of the determining moments, to simultaneously refer to all the scenes involved; or to present each scene in its fictional chronological *order* and discuss the different

determining moments, emphasizing in each case what we believe to be the main determinant (the key signification), and indicating the secondary determinants, which may in turn become the main determinant in other scenes. The first method thus sets up the film as the object of a reading (a text) and then supposedly takes up the totality of its over-determination networks simultaneously, *without taking account of the repressive operation* which, in each scene, determines the realization of a key signification; while the second method *bases itself on the key signification of each scene*, in order to understand the scriptural operation (over-determination and repression) which has set it up.

The first method has the drawback of turning the film into a text which is *readable a priori*; the second has the advantage of making the reading itself participate in the *film's process of becoming-a-text*, and of authorizing such a reading only by what authorizes it in each successive moment of the film. We have therefore chosen the latter method. The fact that the course of our reading will be modelled on the 'cutting' of the film into sequences is absolutely intentional, but the work will involve breaking down the closures of the individual scenes by setting them in action with each other and in each other.⁴

This is the essay's methodological preface. The reading of the film which follows identifies several systems of oppositions and likenesses, somewhat in the manner of Lévi-Strauss. Thus Lincoln is both the figure of ideal law, which prohibits all violence/desire, and the agent of its inscription, which is achieved only through violence. This doubling complements the film's mass-individual opposition, whereby Lincoln is set apart from others by his sacred relation to law and himself imposes this law on others violently. These systems mutually inscribe the analogy between Nature-Law-(River)-Woman and an allied system of debt and exchange, whereby Lincoln is taught to read, led to knowledge, and given the Book of Law by Woman (his mother, Ann Rutledge, and Mrs. Clay respectively), in return for which he owes Her a debt which can only be paid back by his assumption of his mission (to be the Lincoln of myth) and by his incarnation of the Law.

These systems and their interrelations interest us less than the manner of their inscription by the film and of their reading by the *Cahiers* text.

A Lévi-Straussian analysis reduces its object to synchrony and then derives its paradigms. The *Cahiers* analysis performs a second operation. It analyzes how these systems present themselves in the film and how the film negotiates the reader's access to them. They are not presented by the film all at once, they are inscribed, trace by trace, in the film's successive scenes, in its "process of becoming-a-text."

The principal function of this sequence (Scene 2) is to introduce a number of constituent elements of the symbolic scene from which the film is to proceed, by *varying* it and activating it . . . : The Book and the Law, the Family and the Son, exchange and debt, predestination. . . ."⁵

[Third Sequence] Centered on Lincoln, the scene presents the relationship Law-Women-Nature which will be articulated according to a system of complementarity and of substitution-replacement.⁶

This presentation of the film's systems by its writing is not merely an *ordering*, for that suggests an arrangement of what already exists. "Presenting" is itself a half-wrong term for it suggests a deployment of *presences* and omits the equally important function of *absenting*. It omits "*the repressive operation* which, in each scene, determines the realization of a key signification . . . [We must study this] in order to understand the scriptural operation (over-determination and repression) which has set it up."⁷ This presenting-absenting-conjoining operation is "the dynamic of the inscription." Like the ideological project itself and the selection of discourses which inscribe it, the dynamic of the inscription is over-determined—"an overdetermination which is the only possible basis from which these discourses could be realized, the unsaid included in the said and necessary to its constitution."

The dynamic of the inscription is doubled by a process of active reading, which is necessary to make films say what they have to say within what they leave unsaid. The *Cahiers* concept of active reading involves integrating the reader's knowledge with the film and breaking down the closure between individual scenes. An example is Section 18, The Balcony, which reads the

film's dance scene. This follows the lynching scene, the peak of Lincoln's castrating power to date. Mary Todd leads a passive Lincoln from the dance floor to the balcony.

As soon as he is on the balcony, Lincoln is enchanted by the river. Mary Todd waits for a moment for Lincoln to speak or show some interest in her. Then she draws aside, leaving him alone in front of the river.

(a) Dance, balcony, river, moonlight, couple: all these elements create a romantic, intimate, sentimental atmosphere. The scene, however, mercilessly destroys this atmosphere (whose physical signifieds could be already read as more fantastic than romantic) to introduce the dimension of the Sacred.

(b) The transfer from one dimension to the other is effected by Lincoln's enchantment with the river: the commonplace accessory of the "romantic scene" is shifted to an other scene and is at the same time the agent of this shift. An other scene (from which Mary Todd, having no place, withdraws) in which a process of displacement-condensation takes place so that the river simultaneously evokes the first woman Lincoln loved (Ann Rutledge)—an evocation here emptied of any nostalgic or sentimental character—and (see 11) the relationship Nature-Woman-Law. The river is here the ratification of Lincoln's contract with Law. Lincoln, faced with his fate accepts it; the classic moment of any mythological story, where the hero sees his future written and accepts its revelation (the balcony, also a typical accessory of romantic love scenes, is here promoted, by Lincoln's gesture and the camera angle, to the anticipated role of the presidential balcony). Correlatively Lincoln's renunciation of pleasure is written here: from now on Ann Rutledge's death must be read as the real origin both of his castration and of his identification with the Law; and the "inversion" of the dance scene as well as its relation to the lynching scene take on their true meaning: Lincoln does not have the phallus, he is the phallus (see Lacan "La signification du phallus").⁸

This section "makes the reading itself participate in the film's process of becoming a text" and it "authorizes such a reading only by what authorizes it in each successive moment of the film," while at the same time "breaking down the closures of the individual scenes by setting them in action with each other and *in* each other." The scene and the reading—the film's process of becoming a text and the essay's proc-

ess of rewriting the text—are one. The reading is constitutive of the text: "We do not hesitate to force the text, even to rewrite it, insofar as the film only constitutes itself as a text by integration of the reader's knowledge.

In this scene-section, the operation of writing-reading is transformative: it alters the meaning of what has gone before and of what is to follow. Previous scenes-readings are changed retrospectively, subsequent scenes-readings are changed prospectively. These operations are described precisely by the phrases "is written here," "take on their true meaning," and (especially) "from now on . . . must be read as the origin of." The breakdown of closure may be tested by tracing the effects of this scene in other scenes and of others in it. The meaning of these earlier scenes-readings is here altered: those with Ann Rutledge and her gravestone, the early and later meetings with Mrs. Clay. From this point, the scenes-readings concerning Ann Rutledge are not returned to. Their meaning, which is the basis for the film/reading's subsequent development, is settled. The remainder of the film/reading develops the logic of Lincoln's castration, secured here. This logic reaches full realization in the trial scene, which is in turn the passageway to Lincoln's destiny and the nominal fulfillment of the film's ideological project.

The film's discourses and the inscription which presents-absents-conjoins them are studied not in themselves but in relation to the ideological project which they inscribe. The reading shows in great detail the many kinds and grades of relationship between the film's writing, its "relatively autonomous aesthetic process (characters, cinematic *signifiers*, narrative mode)" and its ideological project. Thus the film's digressive narrative mode permits and covers the film's first repression of politics by morality. The cinematic code for time-passing permits another ideological suppression, that of Lincoln's time of reflection concerning what to do, which reinforces its theme of predestination. The Hollywood code of the vigil before an ordeal permits suppression of a scene required by logic but forbidden by the film's hagiographic project. The film's writing also exposes and/or criticizes

its ideological project in a number of ways: the excessiveness of Lincoln's violence throughout, Lincoln's own castration, the film's cruel humor (Lincoln's hitting his opponents at their weakest points), Lincoln's lack of control over his destiny, his being the instrument of truth, etc.

"*Young Mr. Lincoln*" may be read as a critique of structuralism and as a realization of the theoretical critique of structuralism in the area of film criticism. So said Part I of this text and it is easy to show that this is true. The critique of interpretation in *Cahiers* 1(b) applies to practices of paradigmatic structuralism which claim "the kind of absolute knowledge of the exegetist blind to the (historical) ideological determination of his practice and his object-pretext." Section 1(c) critiques that mechanistic structuralism which dissects the object conceived of as a closed structure of discrete units. Section 7 criticizes setting up the film as the object of a reading and turning the film into a text which is readable a priori in favor of its own method of reading.

"*Young Mr. Lincoln*" realizes its theoretical critique of structuralism in its own film-reading practice. Just as defects of structuralism are correlative (see Part I of this text), so are the features of the *Cahiers* reading which overcome them. Proceeding from empiricist epistemology, structuralism constitutes the text as an object and itself as knowing subject vis-à-vis that object. The object-text may then be broken down into discrete units. The *Cahiers* method abolishes the division between the text studied and the discourse which studies. It mixes with the text studied in the ways discussed. As a consequence, it cannot divide the text into closed units for there is no secure position outside the object-text from which to do so. In mixing itself with the text studied, it necessarily breaks down the closure between the sections of the text studied, and between its own sections also.

Ben Brewster's article in the new *Screen* examines Metz's concept of the "singular textual system" in relation to the *Cahiers* study of

Young Mr. Lincoln. The article sets out to show that the *Cahiers* analysis is a genuine reading and not merely a commentary, because it is a motivated reading rather than an arbitrary one. Brewster argues that the codes studied by Metz, produced by study of a large corpus of films and based on the methods of linguistics, are so general that they say very little about any particular film. The large codes analyzed by Metz have a codifying power that is so low as to be almost negligible. "Hence in themselves the cinematic codes implied in the film text are not capable of producing an unambiguous reader who would be able to provide an objective reading of a film text."

What Brewster proposes instead, following the later Metz, is the notion of a conjuncture of codes. "However, when we turn from the codes themselves to the singular textual system, i.e., to the application of the codes in a single film text, the ambiguity inherent in a secondary modelling system can be drastically reduced by the simple procedure of *doubling* (or *trebling*, *quadrupling* . . .) that code or system." Separately the codes have a low encoding value. Combined in a particular film, however, they reinforce each other, largely through redundancy, so that a principle of pertinence is established which regulates or guides the viewer's reading of the film. In this way the reading may be made non-arbitrary. "This codic doubling is by no means an unfamiliar phenomenon. It is what is known in linguistics as *motivation*." Thus the principle of pertinence comes from inside the film, not from outside it. "[T]he motivation of the singular film text marks the pertinent codes, and indeed often first provides these signifying systems with a signified." It is this marking of pertinent codes which defines the implicit reader which Brewster has been seeking.

One problem remains. "The implicit reader is an ideal reader, one who completely conforms to the supposed intentions of the text. Lotman, however, has examined the effects of discrepancy between the text and its (concrete) reader, in particular . . . between the codes employed in the production of a text and those used in its

decipherment." A long quotation from Lotman provides a taxonomy of various relations between codes of production and codes of decipherment of artistic texts. From this passage, Brewster concludes:

It follows that the critical approach to a text is a *reading* in that it both utilizes the codes it has in common with the producer of the text and produces new codes that may or may not have gone into the production of the text with the proviso that the "reading in" of codes is not arbitrary, because it is governed by the rule of pertinence established by the motivations, i.e., multiple codings, that the reading can establish in the text. The authors of "*Young Mr. Lincoln*" are right to insist that "we do not hesitate to force the text, even to rewrite it, insofar as the film only constitutes itself as a text by integration of the reader's knowledge."⁹

We note first that the problems discussed in Brewster's article are generated by the article itself. They are not problems internal to "*Young Mr. Lincoln*." They arise in the attempt to assimilate that study to a theoretical position other than its own. Brewster defends the *Cahiers* study through a Metzian analysis of its method of reading films. He thereby shows the compatibility of the two approaches and, in effect, appropriates the one to the other. Brewster's text specifies its Metzian position in its first paragraph, what might be called its own principle of pertinence in reading "*Young Mr. Lincoln*." It does not, however, justify its proposed reading by showing that it is implicit in the *Cahiers* text. The principle of pertinence is not organized by the text which is read, it is imposed from outside. Hence, in Brewster's own terms, his reading of "*Young Mr. Lincoln*" is arbitrary—it forces and rewrites the *Cahiers* text.

This rewriting is facilitated by Brewster's neglect of *Cahiers'* own statement of position, a massive omission since the latter is set forth at great length. (The reader can produce his/her own critique of Brewster by actively rereading at this point the long passages from *Cahiers* above.) Because he specifies his own position and skips the *Cahiers* position, Brewster is able to read his position directly into the *Cahiers* study, reduced for this purpose to an unfounded phenomenon in search of a theoretical anchor.

The principal question posed by Brewster asserts his position in the form of a question. Behind it lies a complex of unwritten questions, some asked and answered (the unspoken assumptions on which the question rests), some suppressed (alternative questions that might be asked). Brewster asks: Is the *Cahiers* study a genuine reading, because motivated, or merely a commentary, because unmotivated? The question combines two sets of oppositions. The opposition reading/commentary is taken from the *Cahiers* study. The opposition motivated/unmotivated (arbitrary) is taken from Metz. Brewster conjoins these questions in a way which equates them. This equation imposes a Metzian rewriting on *Cahiers*, for even if the latter's study is arbitrary, i.e., nonmotivated by the film itself, it is still not a commentary in the *Cahiers* sense. It does not distill an ideally constituted sense presented as the object's ultimate meaning; above all, it does not miss the reality of the inscription and does not substitute for it a discourse delineating the apparent main statement(s) of the film at a given time. Several passages of "*Young Mr. Lincoln*" make overt admissions of arbitrariness, but this is not the basis on which *Cahiers* distinguishes reading from commentary. Brewster's principal question is entirely systematic, that is, generated by his position. Rather than acknowledge this, however, he presents it as a problem within "*Young Mr. Lincoln*" itself. "[I]t is not so clear what distinguishes a reading which forces the text from the commentary which restates its meaning in an arbitrarily determined manner."

The *Cahiers* distinction between reading and commentary rests on its concepts of an active reading and of making the reading participate in the film's becoming-a-text. In considering the former, Brewster operates a disjuncture that is crucial for the entirety of his argument. "The intention of this 'active reading' is to make the film say what it has to say within what it leaves unsaid, to reveal its 'structuring absences.'" This last theme I shall return to later in this paper: for the moment I want to discuss the problems of the notion of reading in general and of an 'active' reading in particular." Brewster puts

aside the question of structuring absences in order to consider the notions of reading and active reading. But in so doing he violates the *Cahiers* concept, indeed he obliterates it, for you cannot disjoin the *Cahiers* active reading from the structuring absences to which it relates what is present in the text, without utterly rewriting the concept. In separating these terms, Brewster opens up a space for the infusion of Metz—essentially he wants to redefine the concept of active reading in Metzian terms.

So far we have examined the problematic of Brewster's article and its strategy, how his posing of terms sets up the transformation of "*Young Mr. Lincoln*" under the cover of defending it. The balance of our analysis concerns the model of reading which Brewster develops and how this differs from the model proposed in the *Cahiers* study. The complex of differences between the two models may be grouped under the heading, empiricism vs. anti-empiricism, for the principal direction of Brewster's article is that of a regression from the ambitious, if imperfect, post-empiricism of the *Cahiers* analysis. The latter is no more reducible to an empiricist semiology than to an empiricist structuralism. Not surprisingly, we will find many of our criticisms of the latter (see Part I) recurring in new form in relation to Brewster's semiological model.

Brewster's article moves toward identification of the film's discourses and their interrelations. Thus, on page 38, Brewster arrives at a formula for *Young Mr. Lincoln*: the generic code of the early life of a great man is inversely motivated by the Fordian sub-code and the detective story plot (sub-code), which are themselves in parallel motivation. As noted above, the *Cahiers* study does a second and very important operation. It analyzes progressively how the film's discourses appear, disappear, join and disjoin, scene by scene. Brewster merely turns the film into a synchrony, identifies the film-wide codes, and expresses their interrelationships as monoliths. He "turns the film into a text which is readable a priori" and, of course, misses the reality of the inscription. But, as *Cahiers* argues, the truth of the film does not consist in the dis-

courses which it speaks, but in the ways in which it presents, absents, hides, delays, transforms, and combines the discourses which speak it. Of course this operation is ideologically determined and is only revealed by an ideological analysis.

We note further that Brewster's method of reading turns the practice of the analyst into mere reproduction and representation, as opposed to the active, constitutive rewriting activity of the *Cahiers* model. Brewster's model of reading finally resembles, despite his disavowals, a semiotics of communication, concerned above all with the transmission of meaning. Hence his equation of reading with "decoding" and his paramount concern with non-arbitrary decoding, that is, with justifying one's reading entirely by the work itself. It is true that, using Lotman, he seems to come round to a more active, constitutive concept of reading. Indeed, he is required to do so by the *Cahiers* "integration of the reader's knowledge," toward the naturalization of which within his own system, Brewster's article moves. But his bridging this gap is ambiguous at best and fishy at worst: because, in the last instance as well as the first, the text controls the reading. Even if the reading involves the production of new codes which have not entered into the production of the text, this production itself is required by and controlled by the text. Thus "the 'reading in' of codes is not arbitrary, because it is governed by a rule of pertinence established by the motivations, i.e., multiple codings, that the reading can establish in the text." Brewster moves from this sentence to affirmation of the *Cahiers* "forcing the text" and "even rewriting it," but he fails to bridge this gap as well. It is evident from the passages quoted above that *Cahiers* does not subject these concepts nor that of active reading to the pertinence principle established by the text. The *Cahiers* reading goes beyond the text, relating what is present to what is absent, thereby defining its own principles of pertinence. Brewster is concerned with the empirical reading imposed by the text, the reading to which the spectator is subjected: *Cahiers*' interest is not limited to this level.

Concerning this point, it is worth taking seri-

ously *Cahiers'* invocation of Derrida, particularly his concept of inscription. (Though it would be hasty to suppose that the *Cahiers* study has reconciled its diverse theoretical sources—Althusser, Derrida, Lacan, etc.) When the writer or film-maker is conceived as inscriber, that is, as mark-maker, rather than as encoder of a message, then the problem of an arbitrary versus a non-arbitrary reading recedes. This opposition and the model of encoding-transmission-decoding rest upon that essentialism of the sign which Derrida critiques. No longer does the sign contain or present a meaning or stand in for a meaning which is absent. If a text consists only of marks differed in space and deferred in time, then there can be no reading (and indeed no text) without integration of the reader's knowledge.

As noted before, the *Cahiers* study is based (in part) upon the Althusserian concept of a symptomatic reading, centering on the *absence* of problems and concepts within a problematic as much as their presence and seeking to relate the two. Such a reading leads, through the hole in the structure, to the non-asked questions, to the point where the inscription links the visible structure to the larger structure that encompasses it and determines it. There is a strong tendency in Brewster's article, and in empiricist analyses and models generally, to reduce all absences to presences, and thereby to eliminate all holes and gaps. Of course this is part of the empiricist tendency to reify the text as a static object and then to limit itself to analysis to this object. This is what Brewster does in reducing *Young Mr. Lincoln* to the formula mentioned above. First, all aspects of the film are expressed as positivities; second, the relations among these, and therefore the whole of the film, are expressed as a relation among simple positivities. Thus Brewster's "inverse" and "parallel" motivations, which function as simple plus and minus signs in relating film-wide codes. Aside from other defects, this is an alarming reduction and simplification of complex texts such as films. It also tends to undermine the concept of "singular textual system" as Brewster presents it, for its

coding value hardly avoids that generality of extra-filmic codes which the article set out to correct, a result Brewster exploits (see below).

Most alarming of all is Brewster's tendency to reduce ideology itself to a simple positivity, which can be identified and related to other positivities within the film object. Brewster does this, among other ways, by identifying the ideology of *Young Mr. Lincoln* as that of the Hayes-Tilden compromise of 1876. (Peter Wollen also empiricizes ideology in his "Afterword" to the *Young Mr. Lincoln* piece.) Besides committing all the errors of empiricism mentioned above, this removes the sting from ideology by turning it into a simple knowledge that the film merely reproduces and conveniently puts on view for all to see. This turns the film itself into a simple positivity, whose parts may be analyzed and understood perfectly. Like every empirical analysis, however, this leaves the most important questions unanswered. Why was the film itself produced? Why did it include these discourses and leave out others? Why did it combine and inscribe the discourses chosen in the way that it did? If it is ever possible or useful to identify ideology as a simple positivity or text, such as the Hayes-Tilden ideology, then it remains necessary to analyze that *ideological operation* which produces this presence in a particular film, presents it in particular ways, and relates it to other presences. Its specific ideological texts are in truth merely phenomena that are manipulated by the film's ideological operation for its own ends. There can be no adequate analysis based upon such phenomena alone; the ideology which such positivities speak must be uncovered. Thus (need one say it?), the Hayes-Tilden compromise has no permanent or essential meaning. Everything depends upon why, how, and in what context it is spoken. Ideology in the controlling sense is thus the tutor code of the particular ideological texts which speak it. What must be studied is ideology at work in the text, as well as outside it. This is what "*Young Mr. Lincoln*" attempts to do. Thus the film's repression of politics by morality is not a simple fact or datum or positivity. Nor is it a text. It is "a repression

which cannot be indicated once and for all and left at that but rather has to be written into the constantly renewed process of its repression."

Brewster's reduction of ideology to a datum has another important consequence, which is culminated in the article's last paragraph. Identification of the film's ideology as that of the Hayes-Tilden compromise reveals at the same time that many films (including Griffith's) share this ideology. The comparison with Griffith reveals also that *Young Mr. Lincoln's* future anterior structure is not as important as the *Cahiers* analysis supposed, as Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln* carries its hero through political events, yet its ideology is similar to that of *Young Mr. Lincoln*. Brewster concludes:

"It follows from these two points that the generic code (the youth of the hero) and its specific ideological motivation in this film text (the ideology of the Hayes-Tilden compromise) are much less specific to the text and probably to the political conjuncture of its production than the *Cahiers* analysis suggests. Inversely, the 'cracks'—the inverse motivations—are due to the interaction of these very broad sub-codes with the Fordian sub-code—the textual system constituted by Ford's films—and hence this system/code is of more importance than the *Cahiers* analysis implies. '*Young Mr. Lincoln*' thus seems to confirm the intuition, if not the theory and method, of author criticism. The authorial system/code remains a crucial element in the analysis of the American cinema."¹⁰

Brewster's conclusion is a shock. One is astonished that this is what Brewster's analysis has led to, the return of the author. Nothing has prepared one for this. One immediately goes back to determine the steps that led up to this. This conclusion, in relation to which everything before must be reconsidered, requires an entirely different reading of the article. In retrospect it seems that Brewster's analysis has weakened both the Metzian position and that of "*Young Mr. Lincoln*" and that the surprise beneficiary of this double collapse is—the author. While apparently pursuing a Metzian inquiry, Brewster has considerably diluted the effective importance of the Metzian system by showing it of little use in dealing with particular films. Thus he does

not undermine the premises of Metzism nor otherwise attack it directly. He affirms his loyalty at the same time as he hollows out its real importance, turns it into a shell. We have seen how Brewster's analysis results in a flattened, denatured "*Young Mr. Lincoln*." The process whereby the latter was systematically reduced to three codes may now be understood as a careful pre-adapting. The nominal project of integrating Metzism reduced to a shell with a denatured "*Young Mr. Lincoln*" sets up the mutual collapse which Brewster's text has engineered. It remains only, through some historical logical manipulation, to explode two of the three remaining codes to a useless generality, to complete the coup. A carefully built house of cards collapses abruptly; what remains is the author.

Brewster's article must be considered as theoretical and ideological preparation for its eventuation, rearrival of the author, revival of auteur criticism. In this light, Brewster's text plays agent provocateur or just plain saboteur. It is the double agent who has entered the capital where two powerful factions contend and, professing loyalty, undermines both groups in order to prepare the way for that personage whom no one expected, the man on the white horse, the man of destiny, the author. Depleted, weakened from battle, both sides capitulate to the strong man who stands ready to relieve them of their duties: a surprising and decidedly premature reappearance of the author.

Sam Rohdie's editorial takes up the chant.

That process makes the generic codes and their motivations appear less specific to *Young Mr. Lincoln* than the Fordian sub-code. As Ben Brewster points out, this is an affirmation in part of the procedures of author criticism.

Brewster's conclusion gives added relevance to Ed Buscombe's account of author theory and Stephen Heath's comments, particularly Heath's call for a theory of the subject. Ben Brewster indicated the Fordian sub-code as one among a number which intersect within the text and structure the activity of the text. If author criticism is confirmed thereby it is confirmation of an authorial system/code as an element, often crucial, in the work of the text. It is not a confirmation of the ideological construct of the author as punctual source,

creator. The concept of text developed by Brewster and Heath in this number is pivotal for a theory of the subject which will displace rather than re-anchor traditional notions.¹¹

Fortunately Stephen Heath has not lost his head amidst rumors of palace revolution. His "call for a theory of the subject" has nothing to do with the *return* of the subject. It is instead the distinctly different operation of specifying the lowest order of discursive regularity. Discourse produces a subject to speak itself and this production is regulated by ideology. But this has nothing whatever to do with author criticism.

Brewster's "confirmation of the intuition of author criticism" and Rohdie's "affirmation in part of the procedures of author criticism" are misrecognitions based upon and produced by a misreading of the *Cahiers* text. This much the present text has established. But larger issues are involved in these claims, which will require further discussion.

NOTES

1. "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*, a collective text by the Editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*," translated by Helene Lackner and Diana Matias, *Screen*, v. 13 n. 3, Autumn 1972, page 5; "Notes on the Text 'John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*' by the Editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*" by Ben Brewster, *Screen*, v. 14 n. 3, Autumn 1973, page 29.
2. "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*," pp. 5-6.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.
9. Brewster, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
11. *Screen*, v. 14 n. 3, Autumn 1973, p. 3.



Spellbound in Darkness

A HISTORY OF THE SILENT FILM

By George C. Pratt. "The major anthology-cum-reference work on the silent screen... a cinematic archaeologist's delight... a comprehensive, multi-faceted history of its subject."* 66 b & w photos. 576 pp. 8½ x 11 ins.

Paper, \$8.95

The Busby Berkeley Book

By Tony Thomas and Jim Terry, with Busby Berkeley. Foreword by Ruby Keeler. "A beautiful treasure ship of memories and imperishable delights... presents with commentary and over 250 photographs the 50 odd films that Busby Berkeley made during his memorable career."* Over 200 b & w photos. 192 pp. 9 x 12 ins. \$14.95

*FREDERICK SHROYER, L.A. *Herald-Examiner*

At all bookstores

NEW YORK GRAPHIC SOCIETY

140 Greenwich Ave., Greenwich, Conn. 06830
A Time Incorporated Company